The Transnational/ Translational in Italian Studies

1- The transnational and the translational

The terms 'transnational' and 'translational' have gained in visibility and popularity among the Humanities and Social Sciences in recent years. Translation studies emerged as a discipline in the 1980s and 1990s, but the interest in translation as a cultural practice as well as a methodological approach can be traced in areas ranging from philosophy to cultural studies, and from comparative literature to ethnography. At the turn of the millennium, Susan Bassnett described a 'translation turn' taking place in cultural studies.[1] More recently, in the introduction of a special issue of *Translation Studies* devoted to 'The Translational Turn', Doris Bachmann-Medick went as far as asking whether we should identify the 'Humanities as "translation studies"'.[2] As for the 'transnational turn', the term has enjoyed even greater popularity, as critical approaches to the idea of nation have spread across disciplines, resulting in critiques of national literary canons as well as notions of national identity, national memory or national language,[3] but also of established articulations between the national and international dimensions of social life.[4] The two terms – translational and transnational – have also been brought together, notably by Emily Apter who described the phenomenon of 'translational transnationalism' in relation to 'the politics of literacy, literariness, and reading publics'.[5]

In a seminal article published in 2014, Emma Bond noted the distinctive relationship between Italian culture and the transnational as a notion and a set of practices, stating that 'the Italian case is, perhaps, at once peculiarly trans-national and trans-nationally peculiar: historically a space characterized by both internal and external transit and movement, Italy itself can be imagined as a hyphenated, in-between space created by

[1] Susan Bassnett, 'The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies', in *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, ed. by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), pp. 123-40.
[2] Doris Bachmann-Medick, 'Introduction: The Translational Turn', *Translation Studies*, 2.1 (2009), 2-16 (p. 12).
[3] Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca NY & London: Cornell University Press, 2010).
[4] Ulrich Beck, 'The Cosmopolitan State: Redefining Power in the Global Age', *International Journal of Politics Culture and Society*, 18 (2005), 143 –159.
[5] Emily Apter, 'On Translation in a Global Market', *Public Culture*, 13.1 (2001), 1- 12 (p. 5).

the multiple crossings that etch its geographical surfaces and cultural depths'.[6] Bond, citing Vertovec, also made reference to the close association between forms of cultural production such as hybridity, creolization, and cultural translation (p. 416) and the transnational as a notion, though her focus remained firmly on the latter. In the following pages, we want to ask what it means to think translationally and transnationally (possibly connecting these two dimensions) in the context of Italian studies. We will be doing this by establishing a conversation between our distinct individual perspectives. As contributors, we come from different directions in terms of our academic profiles, as well as our experience of teaching and research with a 'transnational/translational' approach, so our interpretations will carry different emphases. As an opening point, therefore, it seems appropriate to describe our own trajectories and positions.

Nick Havely has worked on Anglo-Italian literary and cultural interactions and particularly on the reception of Dante from the fourteenth century onwards. He has taught in a department at the University of York which, from its origins in the 1960s, carried the title of 'English & Related Literature'. One consequence of this ambitious (perhaps arrogant) identification was that all single-subject 'English' students would be required to follow at least one module on a literature in another language; this necessitated the recruitment of teaching staff with interests and qualifications in languages and literatures other than English. In practice, appointments were initially of those with teaching and/or research experience of French, German, Italian, Latin, Old English and Old Norse. The range would widen somewhat in later years to include, for example, Spanish and Arabic, but the primary focus of 'literature in foreign languages' remained European. On the other hand, 'English & European Literature' would not adequately describe the York Department, since its teaching and research have long included American and other Anglophone literatures and now also include 'World Literature' modules. In this latter respect, the York department has been following a widespread and indeed international academic and intellectual trend. Just as 'the transnational turn' in the Humanities and Social Sciences has accelerated over the past few decades, in the UK and the USA as elsewhere, the relationship

[6] Emma Bond, 'Towards a trans-national turn in Italian studies?', *Italian Studies*, 69.3 (2014), 415-424 (p. 421). The reference is to Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

between globalization (economic and cultural) and the globalizing of literary studies has generated considerable debate. Issues here involve definitions of and approaches to, for example, difference, hybridity, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism – as well as the long and short views of the history of globalization; its relationship to postcolonialism; the development of 'border studies'; comparative literary studies; etc.

Loredana Polezzi first taught at Warwick University, where she was part of a Department of Italian Studies that was eventually embedded within a School of Modern Languages and Cultures. She also studied in and later collaborated with Warwick's Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies, one of the historical homes of Translation Studies, where the notion of the 'translation turn' was first developed. She is now Professor of Translation Studies in the School of Modern Languages at Cardiff University. With a personal history as well as an academic trajectory which move between national spaces and disciplinary fields, her engagement with notions of translation and of the transnational is experiential and affective, as much as professional. Her work focuses on forms of geographic, social and linguistic mobility, from travel to migration and from translation to self-translation and translingual writing. The transnational and translational dimensions of cultural exchanges are closely connected in this interdisciplinary space, in line with the approach associated with Translation Studies which was born with the aim 'to raise the profile of the study of translation through rethinking literary history and putting translation into literary historical knowledge'.[7] This move was (and to a large extent still is) 'very radical, because it meant challenging the notion of literary history as written on nationalist premises' (ibid.). While Translation Studies itself remains a disciplinary field with dynamic and often loose boundaries, thinking 'translationally' has a radical impact on our understanding of other disciplines precisely because it re-focuses our gaze on the fluidity and porousness of processes of cultural production, circulation and consumption. Translation – as a linguistic *and* cultural practice – foregrounds the insufficiency of analytical approaches which rely on discrete and self-contained categories such as nation (Britain, Italy, Ireland, the United States, …), but

[7] Susan Bassnett, 'In Conversation – Alessio Mattana and Laura Lucia Rossi speak to Susan Bassnett: Translation, Literature and Reading', *The Translator*, 25. 3 (2019), 282-88 (pp. 282-83).

also language (English, French, Italian, …), or medium (literature, film, music, …). What comes to the fore, on the other hand, is the connectedness of cultural phenomena and their complex articulation of similarity and diversity.

Charles Burdett first taught Italian studies at the University of Cardiff, from where he moved to Bristol and, more recently, Durham. His research, situated between literary and cultural studies, has sought to develop interest in areas of Italian cultural history that have not received a level of attention that is commensurate with their historical significance. In this respect, the trajectory of his research has mirrored the development of Italian studies as it has developed greater openness towards less established areas of inquiry and to the work of less canonical writers. He has worked on the reality and legacy of Italian colonialism and on the travel writing that was produced during the years of the Fascist regime on places within Italy and its colonies, on the Middle East, Spain, Germany, Russia and the United States. His research on the cultural and literary history of the representation of travel is accompanied by a strong interest in theories of inter-cultural and transnational contact and on how legacies of the past are evident in contemporary perceptions both of East Africa and of the Islamic world. An important part of his work concerns the implications for the disciplinary field of Modern Languages of the study of cultural translation in all its forms. In his role as Chair of the Society for Italian Studies (2010-15), he encouraged formal reflection on the rationale of Italian studies and its position within the wider landscape of the Humanities.

For the past few years, Charles Burdett and Loredana Polezzi have been part of the team of researchers involved in the 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures' (TML) and 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Global Challenges' (TML: GC), funded by the AHRC's 'Translating Cultures' theme and the UKRI's Global Challenges Research Fund (see below). The project has brought together transnational and translational approaches, casting the study of Italian cultures in a diasporic framework which clearly exceeds the confines of the Italian nation. While its focus is firmly on post-unification culture, the project also establishes a dialogue with earlier periods and artistic production. Making that dialogue and its implications more explicit is one of the goals we set for ourselves in writing this article *a sei mani*.

2- Modern Languages and the Question of Globalization

Both Higher Education in general and the field of Modern Languages in particular face issues of pressing concern. These are particularly evident in the Anglophone world, where the decline in the study of languages and in related academic posts at Higher Education level has been repeatedly discussed and documented by academic bodies such as the MLA.[8] In the UK, current concerns relate to the level of student fees, the nature of research funding, or the future of programmes like Erasmus. In this context, the future of the study of languages within HE has been addressed in a number of policy documents that have been published over recent years,[9] and, at the same time, a number of research initiatives have been launched to support the field.[10] At a broader level (and well beyond the confines of the Anglosphere), it has become increasingly necessary for subjects in the Arts and Humanities to explain their rationale to as wide a public as possible, reaffirming their central role in any educational system capable of fostering creativity, critical skills, or active citizenship. In an environment where global challenges such as mobility and inter-cultural understanding are high on the agenda of any university, Modern Languages, in particular, has the opportunity to demonstrate how the consideration of such questions is integral to the disciplinary field as a whole and that its place in the academy is, or should be, of increasing – not diminishing – importance.

If such global phenomena are integral to a renewed appreciation of the role of languages and the Humanities, some wider understanding of globalization is, in turn, essential to situate the growing interest in translation and in the transnational and their relevance for Modern Languages and Italian studies as intersecting disciplinary fields

[8] See in particular annual reports and the data available via the 'Academic Workforce Data Centre' on the MLA's website (https://www.mla.org/).
[9] See, for example, the series of position statements and reports published by the British Academy: *Language Matters More and More* (2011), *Languages: the State of the Nation* (2013), *Born Global: A British Academy Project on Languages and Employability* (2016). For details on these reports, see the British Academy website, http://www.britac.ac.uk/
[10] An example of such initiatives is the Open World Research Initiative (OWRI), launched by the AHRC in 2016 with the purpose of establishing new models for languages research in response to the challenges and opportunities presented by a globalized research environment and multi-lingual world. Projects funded under the scheme include: *Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies*; *Language Acts and Worldmaking*; *Cross-Language Dynamics*; *Creative Multilingualism*.

and the methodological approaches which inform them. Economists such as Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen have addressed the convergences, complexities and 'discontents' attendant on the process, and Sen, in his article on 'How to Judge Globalism' offers a long historical and geographical view of globalization beyond the West and of 'our global civilisation [as] a world heritage – not just a collection of disparate local cultures'.[11] Both Stiglitz and Sen, moreover, usefully emphasize the interconnectedness of the economic and cultural effects of globalization, for instance how it can be seen, especially in the contemporary context, as posing a 'threat to cultural identity and values'.[12] The tension between local and global dimensions of social life, as well as the continuing shifts in geopolitical models and modes of international engagement make the role of Modern Languages, with their national roots and their transnational vocation, particularly significant in the context of Higher Education.

Like other cultural institutions, universities have been experiencing the effects – benign and otherwise – of globalization, and scholars in departments of English have for several reasons urgently needed to address those effects and to investigate approaches to the transnational. One of them is prompted by the recent vast increase in Anglophone writing beyond the UK and USA to observe that:

> As the locations from which English literature is produced have multiplied, the rationale for a nation-state model governing its study has appeared increasingly anachronistic. There is an obvious synchronicity between the transnational production of English and the transnationalizing of its study.[13]

In practical terms, Jay's theoretical framework with its outline of current debates about globalization is directed toward the study of transnational aspects of contemporary novels, from Vikram Chandra and Kiran Desai to Zadie Smith and Junot Díaz. Shortly before *Global Matters*, an academic at another English department in the USA, Jahan Ramazani, made a comparable approach to another

[11] Amartya Sen, 'How to Judge Globalism', *American Prospect*, January 1 2002; online at: https://prospect.org/article/how-judge-globalism [accessed 10 December 2019]
[12] Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), p. 247.
[13] Jay, *Global Matters*, p. 25.

major genre in his *Transnational Poetics*, outlining the reasons for resisting 'mononational constructions of modern and contemporary poetry'.[14] Ramazani's subsequent case-studies thus address the positioning not only of modernists like Eliot and Yeats but also of postcolonial poets such as Lorna Goodison and Agha Shahid Ali; and, while he recognizes how the term can denote 'both ethnic separation and cross-cultural interchange, both global dialogue and imperial imposition', he looks to and demonstrates a form of literary study that might 'evoke non-coercive and non-atavistic forms of transnational imaginative belonging'.[15]

The increasing popularity of the notion of World Literature as an area of teaching and research also highlights the shift towards approaches which go beyond national models. At the same time, the debate about World Literature and its nature also underlines some of the enduring tensions and contradictions characterizing that move. While some scholars have privileged macro-approaches to the production and circulation of textual forms,[16] others have focused on individual trajectories or on the history and sociology of reading and readerships.[17] The emergence of World Literature has also prompted a reassessment of more established disciplines such as Comparative Literature from both a postcolonial and a transnational perspective (Spivak 2003; Apter 2006).[18] Most (though perhaps not all) of these approaches are also sensitive to questions of language and translation, with David Damrosh explicitly including the latter in his 'threefold definition' of world literature:

1. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.
2. World literature is writing that gains in translation.
3. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time.[19]

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[14] Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 24.
[15] Ibid, p. 31.
[16] Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review*, 1, 54-68. WReC (Warwick Research Collective), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).
[17] Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999). David Damrosh, *What Is World Literature? (*Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).
[18] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
[19] D. Damrosh, *What is World Literature?*, p. 281.

Critiquing such notions of translation as too closely aligned with the appropriative agenda of globalization, Apter in *Against World Literature* invoked the idea of untranslatability, understood as 'an incorruptible or intransigent nub of meaning that triggers endless translating in response to its resistant singularity'.[20] The ambiguity encapsulated in translation and its difficult yet crucial relationship with globalization have also been captured from a post-Marxist perspective by Naoki Sakai and Sandro Mezzadra, for whom '[t]ranslation can be productive or destructive, by inscribing, erasing or redrawing borders; it is a process, political *par excellence*, which creates social relations and establishes new modes of discrimination'.[21] Translation is 'a deeply ambivalent concept and practice' which has a close, 'constitutive relation with the concept and institute of the border' since it 'produces both bridges and walls' (ibid.). Ultimately, however, translation remains a condition of the transnational production, circulation and consumption of culture as well as of any form of resistance to the negative aspects of their globalization. As such, '[a]ny transnational cultural study must "translate", each time locally and specifically, what decentres and subverts this transnational globality, so that it does not become enthralled by the new global technologies of ideological transmission and cultural consumption'.[22] Translational thinking can then become part of a complex ecology of linguistic and cultural exchange which does not aim to resolve or erase difference, yet also acknowledges the connectedness and open-ended nature of languages and cultures.[23]

In the face of such changes, the way in which most departments of Italian Studies are organized in the UK and Ireland (but also elsewhere) continues to identify the object of research and teaching as Italian culture, understood largely – though not exclusively – through its manifestation in literature in Italian or through the events and processes that have shaped the geographical area that we refer to as Italy.[24] This

[20] E. Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 235.
[21] Naoki Sakai and Sandro Mezzadra, 'Introduction', *Translation*, 1 (2014), 9-27 (p. 9).
[22] Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 241.
[23] David Gramling, *The Invention of Monolingualism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). Michael Cronin, *Eco-Translation: Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
[24] David Robey, '*Italian Studies*: The First Half', *Italian Studies*, 67. 2 (2012) 287-99. Clodagh Brook and Giuliana Pieri 'Italianistica in Gran Bretagna: tra Interdisciplinarità e Tradizione', *La Rassegna della Letteratura Italiana*, 1-2 (2016) 207-16. Charles Burdett, 'Moving from a National to a Transnational Curriculum: the Case of Italian Studies', *Languages, Society and Policy*, July 2018,

does not imply that the discipline has been in thrall to the idea of the nation. The study of the events that occurred and the literary/artistic works that were produced before the creation of the nation state focuses, of course, on such issues as the multiplicity of linguistic communities, regional power relations, modes of religious observance that exceeded the confines that the nineteenth-century concept of the nation would impose. Similarly, work in the modern period, while investigating the formation of the institutions of the state and their impact on people's lives, explores the friction or conflict between regionally based loyalties/practices and the imposition of a homogenized national model, the role that religion continues to play, the consequences of nationalist and internationalist political movements.

Yet, however diverse and multi-faceted approaches to what is generally referred to as Italian culture may be, it remains true that many Italian programmes are set up in such a way that they examine the cultural history of the geographical area that corresponds, roughly speaking, to the boundaries of contemporary Italy. Italian studies thus faces the challenge of how its focus on a geographical area can be combined with a more global perspective. Or rather, the disciplinary field faces the challenge of how the inquiry into the social, cultural, political and other realities of Italy can be more explicitly attuned to practices of human mobility and exchange that occur on a global scale and how the study of what is referred to as Italian culture is best considered as an inroad into the study of the continual exchange and development of practices, lifeways, modes of understanding the material and non-material world that constitutes human culture as a whole.

It is difficult to generalize on the trajectory of the sub-fields of Modern Languages since their histories and their objects of study differ in so many ways, but it is true to say that the direction of travel within the disciplinary field of Modern Languages as a whole is deeply influenced by the global or transnational turn within the Humanities described above. By the movement, in other words, across a wide range of disciplines away from the primacy of the nation as a conceptual category and by the prominence of theoretical work that, emerging in different disciplinary contexts, considers

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http://www.meits.org/policy-papers/paper/moving-from-a-national-to-a-transnational-curriculum-the-case-of-italian-st [accessed 23 January 2020].

economic processes and cultural phenomena in global terms.[25] Bond's essay, as already mentioned, points to the implications of this body of theory for the way in which we conceive Italian studies, its objects of study and its purpose. Thinking about Italian studies beyond the confines of the nation does not mean 'globalizing' the discipline by attempting to prove the worldwide reach of Italian culture or by providing an exhaustive map of Italy's international relations. It means, rather, a change in perspective and methodological approach that pays greater attention to the circulation of people, languages and artefacts: from the routes of the Italian diaspora to the market power of Italian products or the reception of Italian works of art.

The transnational turn within the academy has ongoing implications for all areas of Modern Languages – and of Italian studies –, from the discipline's research remit to its pedagogical approaches and its commitment to public engagement. Among other things, the enhanced attention to the global across the disciplinary field as a whole has a role to play in the necessity of articulating a robust definition of the purpose of Modern Languages within a situation of rapid change within Higher Education. The tenor of many of the policy documents issued by influential public bodies and the very scale of initiatives promoted by research councils over recent years (both cited above) indicate the urgency of thinking beyond established borders.

3- Case Study: Transnational Dante Reception

For a medieval case study it would of course have been possible to identify a number of Italian subjects and writers, including Petrarch, a highly transnational author in his own time and in his early modern reception; but for reasons of space, available expertise and personal interest, it has been decided to focus here on Dante. Diffusion, reception and appropriation of Dante's work over seven centuries and in fifty or so

[25] To cite just a few examples from this extensive body of theoretical material: Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, ed. by Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Jay, *Global Matters* (2010); *Minor Transnationalism*, ed. by Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Walter Mignolo, 'The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism', *Public Culture*, 12.3 (2000), 721-45; W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). S. Vertovec, *Transnationalism*.

languages reflect the long history of what Sen (above) called ‘our global civilisation [as] a world heritage’, as also – and at best – aspects of what Ramazani sees as ‘transnational imaginative belonging’. At the beginning of the millennium the *Publications of the Modern Language Association* included a number on the special topic of 'Globalizing Literary Studies'.[26] Its section of papers from the 2000 convention began with an address by the late Edward Said on the subject in general and ended with an essay by Wai Chee Dimock which focused primarily upon Osip Mandelstam’s reading of Dante at the time of the Stalinist purges as a key example of what is described as ‘Literature for the Planet’.[27] The 'continuum' between Dante and Mandelstam is presented by Dimock as showing how 'authors centuries and thousands of miles apart can turn out to be inseparable'; how reading 'mocks the borders of the nation, just as it mocks the life span of the individual'; and how the denationalizing 'resonance' of the *Commedia* in Stalin's Soviet Union 'randomized the poem by turning it into a temporal hybrid ... accidentally born into the world through the accidental union between fourteenth-century Italy and twentieth-century Russia'.[28]

How have that and other kinds of 'continuum' been addressed elsewhere in the discussion of transnational Dantes? Much of twentieth-century work on the *fortuna di Dante fuori d'Italia* – to cite the title of an early anthology – has been limited to Europe.[29] At the beginning of the century, Paget Toynbee’s monumental two-volume anthology focused solely upon *Dante in English Literature*.[30] Werner P. Friederich's ambitious survey of *Dante's Fame Abroad* ran from Spain to the United States by way of France, Britain, Germany and Switzerland, although its chronological span stopped – as did much of academic literary study at the time – a hundred years short of its publication date.[31] Later in the twentieth century, a key work on Dante's afterlife, Michael Caesar's *Critical Heritage* anthology of 1989, rightly prioritized the

[26] 'Globalizing Literary Studies', *PMLA*, 116.1 (2001).
[27] Wai Chee Dimock, 'Literature for the Planet', *PMLA*, 116.1 (2001), 173-88.
[28] Dimock, pp. 174, 178, 179.
[29] Marco Besso, *La fortuna di Dante fuori d'Italia: saggio con tre bibliografie e settanta illustrazioni* (Rome: L.S. Olschki, 1912).
[30] Paget Jackson Toynbee, *Dante in English Literature from Chaucer to Cary (c. 1380-1844)*, 2 vols (London: Methuen, 1909).
[31] Werner Friederich, *Dante's Fame Abroad, 1350-1850: The Influence of Dante Alighieri on the Poets and Scholars of Spain, France, England, Germany, Switzerland and the United States; A Survey of the Present State of Scholarship* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Studies in Comparative Literature, 1950).

development of Italian critical attitudes up to the end of the seventeenth century, giving more scope thereafter to the transnational rediscovery of Dante in Britain, France, Germany and the USA, and ending the story with the accelerated development of the international Dante critical industry in the later nineteenth century.[32]

Early in the same year as the publication of Caesar's *Critical Heritage* volume, a significant development in the contemporary transnational study of Dante was marked by a conference at Rome on 'L'Opera di Dante nel Mondo: Edizioni e traduzioni nel Novecento'. The subsequent collection of *Atti* proposed 'una panoramica scientificamente aggiornata della presenza dell'opera dell'Alighieri nelle più diverse aree linguistico-geografiche',[33] and that conspectus is notable for the range of its interest in translation. Under the rubric of *come ho tradotto Dante* it included contributions from translators not only into French and Spanish but also into Bulgarian, Croatian and Polish; whilst its survey of translations was worldwide in scope, taking in about twenty-five languages and 'areas' of Europe and the Americas, and extending beyond these to translation in Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Hebrew and Japanese.

In the present century, a number of symposia on Dante reception have continued to address wider transnational issues. At the 2001 conference about 'Dante on View', for example, a variety of cross-cultural currents were traced in the visual and performing arts in nineteenth-century France and modern Spain as well as in Britain and the USA.[34] At York in 2008, papers on 'Dante in the Nineteenth Century' gave rise to further investigations of reception in, for instance, Occitan, Anglo-Irish culture, the Bengali Renaissance, and late Ottoman Turkey.[35] 'Metamorphosing Dante' was illustrated at Berlin in 2009 by discussion of rewriting, intersection and translation in for example modernist Irish writers and African-American fiction – the latter taking issue critically with Edward Said's claim that the *Commedia* is 'essentially an imperial

[32] Michael Caesar, *Dante: The Critical Heritage, 1314(?)- 1870* (London: Routledge, 1989).
[33] *L'opera di dante nel mondo: edizioni e traduzioni nel Novecento*, ed. by Esposito, Enzo (Ravenna: Longo, 1992), p. 7.
[34] *Dante on View: The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, ed. by Antonella Braida and Luisa Calè (Aldershot & Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2007).
[35] *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity and Appropriation*, ed. by Aida Audeh, and Nick Havely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

text that is foundational to the imperial discipline of comparative literature'.[36] A wider geographical scope was adopted by a conference on 'La ricezione di Dante Alighieri' the following year at the University of Urbino following 'sulle tracce che il Poeta ha lasciato in culture europee ed extra-europee – dall'Italia alla Germania, dalla Russia al mondo arabo ed alla Cina –, in letteratura, in musica, nelle arti visive e nel cinema'.[37] Around the same time, volume 3 of the Rome conference on *Dante Oggi* addressed a comparable range of *tracce*.[38] And later in the present decade the need to extend the scope of thinking about Dante's *fortuna* has been reflected, for instance in the contributions to a conference at Verona (October 2016) on 'Dante oltre i confini: la ricezione dell'opera dantesca nelle letterature altre', which, although focusing chiefly on France, Germany and Spain, has also produced several essays on reception and translation in Russian.[39]

Ongoing collaborative projects and university courses are continuing to provide forums and resources for the study of Dante reception in terms of the transnational and translational. Amongst a number of websites providing material for Dante studies, one of the most useful from this point of view is 'Dante Today: Citings and Citings in Contemporary Culture' (http://research.bowdoin.edu/dante-today).[40] '*Mondialisation*' as well as 'Dante' describe the current programme of 'MODA', which is based at the University of Lorraine (Nancy) and which – having recently hosted presentations on 'Dante in Cina' and 'Dante in Brazil' by researchers at La Sapienza (Alessendra Brezzi and Sonia Netto Salomao) – will, during the coming year, extend its 'tour d'horizon du dantisme "mondialisé"' to include research on Arabic, Hebrew, Croatian and Russian reception. Teaching of the subject at undergraduate and postgraduate level has shown a comparable extension of range as well as reflecting the 'transnational turn in literary

[36] Manuele Gragnolati, Fabio Camilletti, and Fabian Lampart, *Metamorphosing Dante: Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Vienna & Berlin: Turia & Kant, 2011), pp. 37-59 and 305. The reference is to Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 43-48.
[37] *La ricezione di Dante Alighieri, Impulsi e tensioni: Atti del convegno internazionale all'Università di Urbino, 26 e 27 maggio 2010*, ed. by Rita Unfer Lukoschik and Michael Dallapiazza ((Munich: Peter Lang, 2011).
[38] *Dante Oggi*, ed. by Roberto Antonelli, Annalisa Landolfi, and Arianna Punzi, vol. 3: *Nel mondo* (Rome: Viella and La Sapienza, 2011).
[39] Silvia Monti, *Dante oltre i confini: la recezione dell'opera dantesca nelle letterature altre* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2018), pp. 45-60 and 123-38.
[40] 'Dante Today: Citings and Citings in Contemporary Culture', ed. by Arielle Saiber and Beth Coggeshall, http://research.bowdoin.edu/dante-today [accessed 10 December 2019]

studies'. The forthcoming MLA volume on *Approaches to Teaching Dante's 'Divine Comedy'* includes a chapter on 'Transnational Dantes' which describes courses on reception offered by literature departments at, for example, Basel, Nottingham and Philadelphia. The chapter illustrates some of the ambitious student-driven research (on writers as diverse as Murasaki, Walcott and Sri Aurobindo) that has derived from such courses. It further suggests that future teaching might – whilst addressing issues such as influence, intertextuality, translation etc. – also engage with 'factors such as: the circulation of manuscripts and printed texts; the role of expatriates in promoting and appropriating Dante's work; Dante's involvement in polemic, propaganda and censorship; ... and attempts at popularization of the *Commedia* through lectures, festivals and other media' (Havely in Kleinhenz & Olson [eds], forthcoming 2019).[41]

4- Case study: 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages' (TML)

The project 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures' (2014-17) offers a further example of the global dimension of Italian studies and of the constitutive role played within the field by transnational as well as translational phenomena (as well as the attendant methodological approaches). TML brought together a large team of researchers drawn from literary/cultural studies, linguistics, history, visual culture and art therapy to examine the forms of mobility that have defined the development of modern Italian culture. Concentrating on exemplary cases, representative of the geographic, historical and linguistic map of Italian mobility and working with a wide range of project partners, TML has looked at Italian communities established in the UK, the US, Australia, South America, Africa and at the migrant communities of contemporary Italy.[42]

Focussing on the cultural associations that each community has formed, the project has examined the wealth of publications and materials that are associated with these organizations: journals, life stories, photographs, collections of memorabilia, and

[41] *Approaches to Teaching Dante's 'Divine Comedy'*, ed. by Christopher Kleinhenz and Kristina Olson (New York: Modern Language Association, 2020) (forthcoming).
[42] For a full list of the researchers of the project, see the TML website: https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/about/people/. The final report of the AHRC's 'Translating Cultures' theme is forthcoming.

other forms of representation. It has sought to explore how the understanding of 'Italianness' is articulated in different historical, geographic and social contexts, as well as through different linguistic codes, and modes of textual or visual expression.

The project took as its starting point the observation that '[l]anguages and language exchanges play a vital role in the perpetual processes of negotiation, contrast and transposition which together constitute culture'. It aimed to investigate 'a series of critical instances of this interdependency in Italian history as a template from which to develop a transformative paradigm for the work of Modern Language studies and its applications in the 21st century'.[43] Building on innovative work in areas of Italian studies ranging from colonial and post-colonial history to migrant writing or Italian American literature, the project set out to explore the complex map of events and practices associated with Italian culture, stressing the multiple forms of mobility which are implicit in any such notion. It focused on the post-unification period and on how the history of the country as a nation state is marked by emigration and immigration, but also by phenomena such as colonial settlement or return migration. Those different experiences have resulted in equally complex maps of linguistic behaviour, cultural production and memory practices among communities and individuals associated with the label 'Italian'. These maps, in common with any other example of mobility, are fluid and are subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation, mediation and remediation.[44]

Approaching Italian studies as a transnational and translational space makes it possible to broaden the boundaries of the discipline, acknowledging the need for greater inclusivity, both in terms of objects of study and methodological approaches. Placing mobility at the centre of the research map (rather than treating it as a secondary, marginal or accidental feature of an essentially national narrative) brings into focus how labels such as 'Italy' and 'Italian' are at once essential and essentializing, indispensable and insufficient. Just as 'Italian culture' is not a homogeneous entity, so it is not co-extensive with the space of the nation, nor with the Italian language (which, of course, is itself far from a single, standardized and

[43] The quotations are taken from the project's case for support, available on the project website.
[44] *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

stable object). Cultural and linguistic practices or products escape and exceed the limits imposed by any definition of the term 'Italian', exposing its shifting nature. Yet that term also maintains the power to define and absorb, or to exclude and marginalize. In its porosity, it continues to signify something specific and identifiable, functioning as a notion which carries historical specificity and cultural capital just as it (thankfully) fails to crystallize into any permanent and prescriptive meaning.

A re-designed, transnational map of Italian studies built on such an inclusive and porous definition not only encompasses but also foregrounds historical dimensions such as colonialism, post-colonialism and decoloniality. It also repositions migration and diasporic communities as direct contributors to the formation of Italian culture, thus querying and critiquing notions of homogeneity and canonicity, whether they are applied to literature, film, or any other forms of cultural expression. Italian culture is not simply produced inside the nation and then exported outside its boundaries, as in the (in)famous economic model of the 'Made in Italy'.[45] Rather, it is constructed in and through the tension between national (as well as local) and transnational modes of production, circulation and fruition. It exploits the porousness of borders, thriving on the distinctive traits that mark its products as 'Italian', while at the same time allowing them to renew, adapt, hybridize.

Translation is a central component of such processes – and paying attention to translation, with its interconnected linguistic and cultural dimensions, reiterates the impossibility and undesirability of separating 'language' from 'culture'. Thinking transnationally and translationally, however, also brings to the fore and reframes the *questione della lingua*. In a well-known passage of the *Quaderni dal carcere*, Gramsci noted:

> Ogni volta che affiora, in un modo o nell'altro, la quistione della lingua, significa che si sta imponendo una serie di altri problemi: la formazione e l'allargamento della classe dirigente, la necessità di stabilire rapporti piú intimi e sicuri tra i gruppi dirigenti e la massa popolare-nazionale, cioè di riorganizzare l'egemonia

[45] *Made in Italy: Rethinking a Century of Italian Design*, ed. by Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

culturale.[46]

This is all the more true once we broaden the boundaries of Italian studies and acknowledge that there is no simple equivalence between labels such as 'Italy', 'Italian language', 'Italian culture'. The mono- or homolingual model of the nation, which never aligned with the historical reality of the Italian peninsula, becomes even more evidently untenable once we rethink our approach through the lens of mobility. Following the life narratives and linguistic trajectories of migrants moving in and out of Italy, or of those who inherited their memories and experiences, takes us into a world which is rich in languages and in diversity. Some of those languages are more official, codified and standardized than others. Some have left more visible, numerous or durable traces. Some overlap and merge in unexpected and unpredictable ways. Yet, all are part of the history of mobile, diasporic Italian cultures, of their dynamic intersections, of their transformative, creative force. Rethinking that history and that dynamic also means asking questions about class, belonging, cultural hegemony.

A major part of the TML project was to examine these questions across diverse geographical areas at different moments in time, from Scotland to Argentina, or from the Italian peninsula to Australia. Researchers explored the private archives of families with a history of colonial settlement, the communication and mediation strategies of immigrant communities in Italy's contemporary urban spaces, and the use of visual art, verbal language and performance by second- and third-generation women artists who engage with a family history of migration.[47] Underlying the project has been the attempt to explore new directions in Italian studies by looking at cultural products as diverse as literature, music, food, photography, or everyday objects associated with labour, home and leisure.[48] Part of the intention has also been to explore new means of communicating the questions at the heart of the project and

[46] Antonio Gramsci, , *Quaderni dal carcere*, ed. by Valentino Gerratana, 4 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), p. 2346.
[47] The forthcoming collection of essays, *Transnational Italies: Mobility, Subjectivity and Modern Italian Cultures*, ed. by Charles Burdett, Loredana Polezzi and Barbara Spadaro, (Liverpool University Press), will exemplify the kind of work that researchers associated with the project have been pursuing.
[48] On the development of ethnographic approaches with Modern Languages, see Naomi Wells and Charles Forsdick, 'Ethnography and Modern Languages', *Modern Languages Open*, January 2019, https://www.modernlanguagesopen.org/articles/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.242/. [accessed 23 January 2020].

the possible future directions of the research.[49] It was with this in mind that the project exhibition *Beyond Borders: Transnational Italy* was staged between 2016 and 2018.[50]

There is a further and very important element to the thinking around new directions in which a disciplinary field might travel. In the current climate it is no longer enough to concentrate mostly on what is happening at university level. It is essential to try to connect any new initiative with what is happening outside Higher Education. An important part of TML has been to encourage thinking concerning cultural translation both within the wider community and at various stages within the educational process. The project organized a series of creative writing workshops in the West Midlands aimed at those writing and living between languages and cultures and it has co-produced research with Drummond and Castlebrae Community High Schools in Edinburgh. The aim has been to embed the awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity within educational practices, from primary to higher and adult education.[51] The emphasis on pedagogy was an element of the project that it was possible to develop further through a Global Challenges follow-on grant (TML: GC, see above).[52] The project brought together educational establishments in the UK and Namibia, a post-colonial country where language skills and the linguistic landscape are undergoing rapid transformation. The aim has been to explore how multilingualism can be developed in both the British and Namibian education systems, with links developed that will enable both sides to share experiences and

[49] The conference, 'Transnational Italies: Mobility, Subjectivities and Modern Italian Cultures', organized at the British School at Rome (October 2016), sought to bring research initiatives together around discussion of Italian studies in a global frame. The plenary sessions of the conference are available online. See the media collection of the project website under TML conference, 'Transnational Italies', see: https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/media-collection/events-workshops/. [accessed 23 January 2020].

[50] The trailer of the exhibition is available on the website of the project. In its different formats, the exhibition was staged at the Calandra Institute in New York, the Casa Italiana in Melbourne, and at the Italian Cultural Institutes in London, Addis Ababa and Tunis. For further information on the development of the exhibition, see the collection of articles by Derek Duncan and by Viviana Gravano and Giulia Grechi, 'Beyond Borders: Transnational Italy' *Italian Studies* (74.4) 2019, 381-96.

[51] For a short video on the work that TML has accomplished in schools, see: http://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/2017/03/21/tml-work-with-drummond-and-castlebrae-ch-schools/ .

[52] This element of the project led to the participation of members of the research team in the writing of the Salzburg Statement for a Multilingual World. See: https://www.salzburgglobal.org/multi-year-series/education.html?pageId=8543.

learn from each other's methodologies.[53]

More generally, the aim of TML – indicated in its title – has been to reflect on the range, purpose and object of study of Modern Languages as a disciplinary field and to suggest ways in which some of the insights of the project can inform collective thinking on the framework of the subject area and how research findings can be translated into pedagogical practice.[54] One of the most ambitious initiatives of the project in this area is the series 'Transnational Modern Languages' which is in preparation with Liverpool University Press.[55] With volumes forthcoming on French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Russian studies together with a Handbook that anchors the series as a whole, the books are intended to promote a model of Modern Languages not as the inquiry into separate national traditions, but as the study of languages, cultures and their interactions. It thus aims to demonstrate the value of modern language study when conceived as transnational cultural enquiry.

5- **Conclusion: Directions of travel**

The case studies outlined above testify to the enduring range and significance of Italian studies but they also testify to the way in which a translational and transnational approach to examples drawn from different periods and types of production can illuminate movements within global culture. Both examples, while very distinct, also demonstrate that an approach that is seeking to examine the global resonance of a given phenomenon necessarily uses a wide array of critical operations to address the significance of a given textual or visual artefact.

In common with any other subject area, Italian studies needs to be in close contact

[53] The recommendations that have emerged from the work that TML and TML: GC have pursued with their project partners were set out in the policy report, 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Reframing Language Education for a Global Future' that was presented at the British Academy in November 2008. The policy report is available at: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/transnationalizing-modern-languages/. The recording of the presentation of the report at the British Academy is available at: https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/2018/09/24/tml-policy-report-and-ba-event/.

[54] It was on this theme, that the conference, 'Transnational Modern Languages', was organized at the Italian Cultural Institute in London (December 2016). Recordings of the plenary sessions of the conference are at: https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/2017/03/20/tml-conference-transnational-modern-languages-ici-2016-on-youtube/

[55] For details of the series, see Liverpool University Press: https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/series/series-13275/.

with and to draw upon research and methodologies from other subject areas and disciplines, such as those from which a few examples are given above (other branches of literary and linguistic studies, philosophy, social sciences, etc.). That dialogue is facilitated if the subject area has a stronger, explicitly articulated, sense of how its methodological operations are interconnected and how it can extend the range of its objects of study. This is certainly true for research and teaching involving the reception of Italian culture and writing. One challenge facing this area is how it can develop a broader remit, one that is truly global, so that it can construct, for example, a more convincing account of 'Dante oltre i confini'.

A recent approach (from a Germanist and comparatist angle) to the theory and poetics of translation raises questions that would probably be relevant to those dealing with texts translated from and into Italian.[56] Much has, of course, been written about the contexts, practice and influence of translation of Italian authors (especially the *grandi voci*) into other – especially European – languages. Is there perhaps scope for greater attention to be paid to the cultural impact that some writers have generated through being translated into Italian? For instance, one of Paul Jay's main case-studies in *Global Matters* deals with issues of globalisation and nationalism in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*,[57] but it does not address an important – if problematic – aspect of the transnational in this case: the reception of the award-winning novel in other languages and cultures. Giuseppina Oneto's Italian translation, *Eredi della sconfitta*,[58] for example, appeared within a year of the original's publication. With what impact? A specular question can be asked about the transnational trajectory and impact of recent bestsellers, starting with Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Quartet novels and their translations, including Ann Goldstein's English version. To complicate the map even further, we may look at the impact of translingual writers who adopt Italian as their language of choice, from recent migrant writing to the case of Jumpha Lahiri, her 2015 Italian novel *In altre parole* and its subsequent appearance as *In Other Words* (2016),[59] a volume which includes both the original text and its English

[56] Jean Boase-Beier, *A Critical Introduction to Translation Studies* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011).
[57] P. Jay, *Global Matters*. pp. 118-36.
[58] Kiran Desai, tr. Giuseppina Oneto, *Eredi della sconfitta* (Milan: Adelphi, 2007).
[59] Jumpha Lahiri, *In altre parole* (Milan: Guanda, 2015). *In Other Words*, trans. Ann Goldstein (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

translation (this too, written by Goldstein).

These examples also open up the question of reading in translation. The reframing of Italian studies we have traced so far has important implications not just for *what* is or can be included in our teaching but also for *how* that material is accessed and studied. Just as the position of translation in language teaching methodology is being reassessed,[60] so its role in accessing literature and other forms of cultural production needs to be openly debated. The divide between reading in translation or in the source language has been largely framed in the light of a monolingual model of national literatures and cultures which, as we have tried to illustrate, is far too rigid and does not reflect the dynamic, transnational nature of production, circulation and reception processes. As a result, the importance of reading 'in the original language' has been hugely fetishized and, as a corollary, the use of translations has been frequently demonized. This does not mean that we should downplay the importance of language or, indeed, of the acquisition of language skills. On the contrary, the approach we have traced here underlines how studying cultures always leads to encounters with multiple languages – and the multilingual nature of creative exchanges makes the nexus between language and culture all the more visible. Translation, precisely because of its incompleteness and its creativity, its fallibility and its productive power, can be a strategic tool in highlighting the agency involved in any act of reading, or the importance of paying attention to language in any form of interpretation. So, while we do not need to demonize reading in translation, we must not render the act of translation invisible, nor approach the translated text as a neutral, transparent, equivalent substitute of the source text.

Once again, Dante and his work provide an apposite example of how attitudes to translation can inform both scholarly and pedagogical practice. Some critics – including Italian studies specialists – have deplored the proliferation of English translations of Dante's *Commedia*. Yet this, as is argued in a recent anthology of 70 different English versions of canti from the *Inferno*, is to miss the point: 'the unabated

[60] See for instance the event 'The Translation Turn: Current Debates on the Role of Translation in Language Teaching and Learning', held in Cambridge in September 2019. See: https://ctts.ie/2019/06/26/conference-the-translation-turn-current-debates-on-the-role-of-translation-in-language-teaching-and-learning-university-of-cambridge-9th-september-2019/

urge to translate (and therefore to read) Dante in the English-speaking world stems not from the inadequacy of past translations but from the richness of Dante's Italian'.[61] Accessing a variety of translations of the *Commedia* can make that richness immediately visible to any reader and it can signal how, 'far from being a marginal activity, translation is, and always has been, fundamental to literary and cultural renewal and change'.[62] The inclusion of migrant and translingual writing in the corpus of materials that constitute 'Italian culture' further underlines this point. These are texts which often intentionally and explicitly display their multilingual, translational nature. By doing so, they foreground the instability that is already inscribed in any original,[63] as well as the constitutive nature of translation as a condition of their existence, rather than an *a posteriori* accident of their reception history.[64]

In the case of students of Italian language and culture, being faced with different translations, or with original writing which incorporates and foregrounds processes of translation, can lead to greater appreciation of the complexity of any act of linguistic and cultural mediation and re-creation. Learning *how* to read in translation, learning to read a translation *as a translation*,[65] and learning to pay attention to the *processes of translation* frequently embedded even in original texts are strategies which undermine assumptions about the transparency of languages and disavow the arrogance of monolingualism and 'language indifference'.[66] If consciously and critically approached, translation can therefore be used to sensitize learners about the importance of acquiring linguistic (and cultural) competence – rather than acting as a substitute for those skills.

As we approach Italian studies (but also, more broadly, Modern Languages or even the Humanities) from a transnational and translational perspective, the main shift we

[61] *To Hell and Back: An Anthology of Dante's 'Inferno' in English Translation (1782-2017)*, ed. by Tim Smith and Marco Sonzogni (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2017), p. xix.
[62] Susan Bassnett, *Translation* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 178.
[63] Karen Emmerich, *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017).
[64] Loredana Polezzi, 'Questioni di lingua: fra traduzione e autotraduzione', in *Leggere il testo e il mondo: vent'anni di scrittura della migrazione in Italia*, ed. by F. Pezzarossa and I. Rossini (Bologna: CLUEB, 2012), pp. 15-31.
[65] Lawrence Venuti, 'How to Read a Translation', *Words Without Borders: The On-Line Magazine for International Literature*, 2004; now also in Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 109-15.
[66] Loredana Polezzi, 'Language Indifference', in *Translating Cultures: A Glossary*, forthcoming.

are operating is one of focus and method. This does not mean that we have to discard our disciplinary traditions, our expertise, or our objects of study (for instance, by restricting the chronological span of our research and teaching, privileging a 'contemporary-at-all-costs' perspective). It also does not mean that 'the national', as a dimension of culture, is jettisoned or relegated to a new marginality. On the contrary, what the pairing of the transnational and the translational suggests is the development of a coherent and cohesive methodology, which foregrounds the specificity of Modern Languages research (and of Italian studies within it), while at the same time underlying the interconnectedness of national and transnational phenomena. The national and the transnational are not antithetical nor mutually exclusive. Rather, they exist in tension, 'contrapuntally', to use Said's word.[67] Translation, understood as a method and a set of analytical tools (rather than in the restricted and restrictive sense of a form of 'purely' linguistic transfer or even, paradoxically, as a practice that erases the presence of 'other' languages and the need to learn them), provides a powerful lens through which we can observe that interplay and study the negotiation of identity and diversity which is at the core of all forms of cultural production and exchange.

[67] E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.